

# 60 Years Later

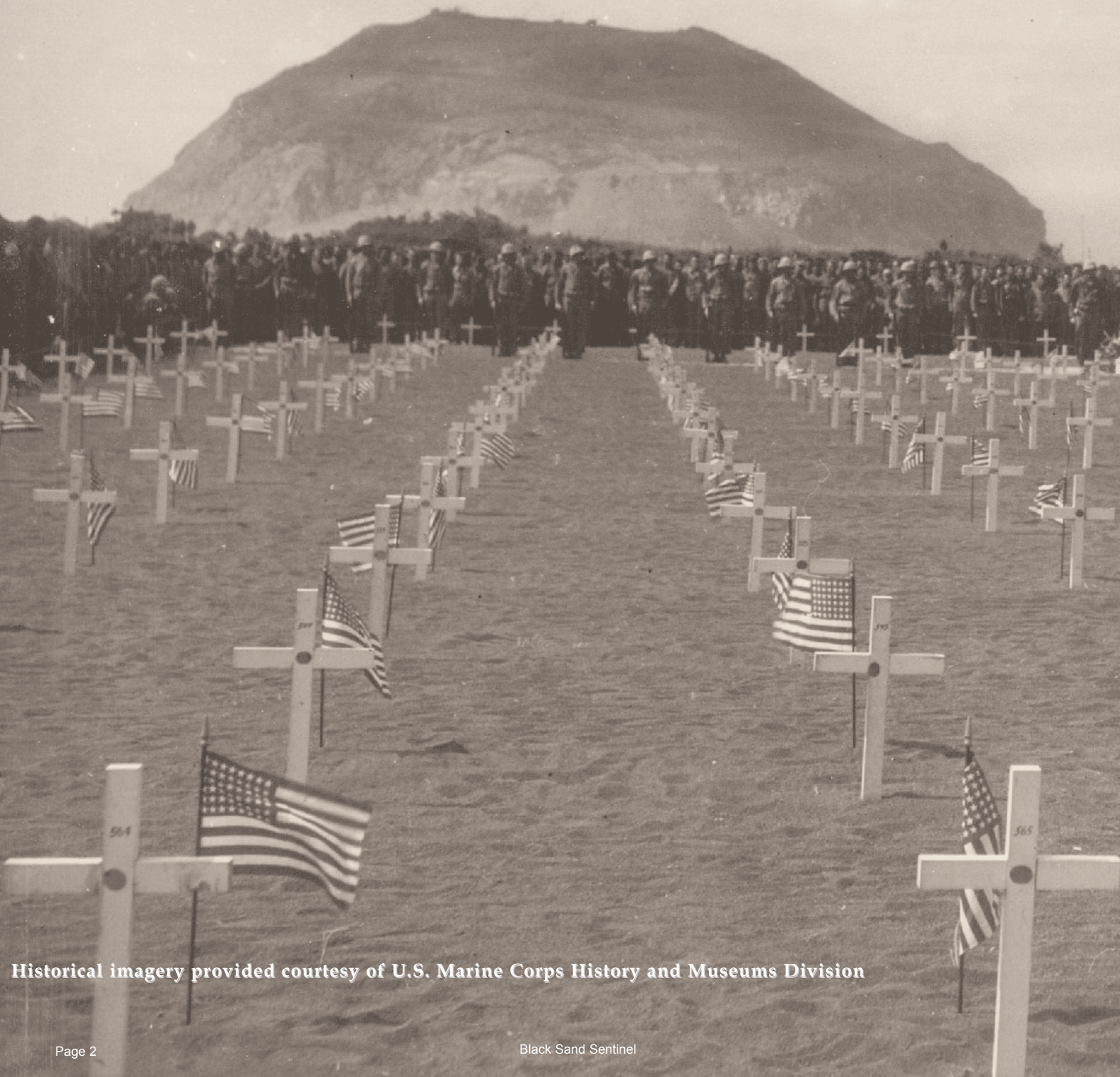


Black Sand Sentinel Special Edition



Cover: Higgins boats approach the shores of Iwo Jima on D-Day, Feb. 19, 1945.

Below: In the shadow of Mt. Suribachi Old Glory flies at half-mast as Marines gather to honor the fallen at the dedication of the 5th Marine Division Cemetery.



Historical imagery provided courtesy of U.S. Marine Corps History and Museums Division



# From the Bridge

Shipmates, family and friends of USS IWO JIMA:

This month marks the 60th Anniversary of the Battle of Iwo Jima. As the men and women of USS IWO JIMA (LHD-7), we are the inheritors of a rich and proud heritage like no other in our Navy. And so, it falls to us, as commemoration of this epic campaign unfolds, to remember the great patriots that made the ultimate sacrifice during the liberation of the Pacific.

On February 19, the ship held the IWO JIMA Ball. Nearly 750 crewmembers and their families and friends were able to attend this spectacular event. I sincerely appreciate the efforts of the MWR committee and their supporters in organizing such a wonderful evening. But as part of that celebration, we all took a moment to

reflect on our heritage. And thanks to the inspiring presentation put together by our XO, Captain Walley, and his family, the images of 60 years ago and 4 years ago were brought to mind. And again, on the 23rd of February, we held a ceremony on the flight deck, commemorating the 60th anniversary of the raising of our National Ensign atop Mount Suribachi. And like the Sailors and Marines of 60 years ago, we cheered and shouted as our great flag was launched into the breeze.

IWO JIMA will conclude the 60th Anniversary commemoration on the 24th of March with a sunset parade and concert by the Marine Corps' famous "Eighth and I" for the Iwo Jima survivors. At this event, we hope to unveil a commemorative wall listing the names of the nearly 7,000 Marines, Sailors,



and other service members that lost their lives during the horrific days of February and March 1945.

To the Sailors and Marines of USS IWO JIMA: Be proud of your heritage. And never forget the legacy of those who sacrificed 60 years ago so that we may be worthy of that heritage.



The Black Sand Sentinel is an authorized newspaper published every Sunday underway and every other Friday in port. Submissions are accepted 48 hours prior to the day of intended publish. Submissions should be double spaced and emailed to: [pao@iwo-jima.navy.mil](mailto:pao@iwo-jima.navy.mil). The editorial staff reserves the right to edit all submitted material. The content of the Black Sand Sentinel should not be interpreted as government, Navy or command policy statements.

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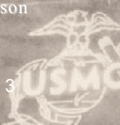
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# An Image For the Ages

By JO1(SW) Mike Jones  
Editor

The flag was up. Old Glory, small as she seemed, was flapping proudly in the Pacific breeze atop Mt. Suribachi, the ancient volcano on the tiny island of Iwo Jima, claimed after four days of bloody fighting in February 1945.

"The flag's already up," growled Leatherneck Magazine Photographer Sgt. Lou Lowery as he staggered down the rugged slope past Associated Press Photographer Joe Rosenthal and Marine Photographers Pfc. Bob Campbell and Staff Sgt. Bill Genaust.

At approximately 10:30 a.m., Feb. 23, Marines from Easy Co., 2/28 raised the American flag over Mt. Suribachi, signaling the capture of the strategic position.

"The view's nice up there," Lowery added. "You should go check it out."



Shrugging off the missed photo-op, Rosenthal continued the climb with Genaust and Campbell – the view might be worth it.

It was then that Rosenthal noticed a slight-built New Hampshire Marine named Rene Gagnon scurrying up the cliffs with a large flag tucked under his arm. He had been dispatched to the summit with fresh batteries for the radioman, and to help replace the first flag with a much larger one – one that could be seen across the entire island.

Although he missed the first flag-raising, Rosenthal instinctively prepared his cumbersome Speed Graphic camera in the off-chance he might get the second. "I saw a small group of Marines assembling a pole on the ground," Rosenthal remembered in a recent documentary. "I said, 'What are you doing, fellas,' and one of them responded, 'We're getting ready to put up this larger flag. The Colonel down below wants it up. He also wants to make damn sure he gets that first flag back.'"

Barely standing over five feet tall, Rosenthal built a small pile of rocks capped with a sandbag to give him a better view. Passing in front, Genaust asked, "Am I in your way, Joe?" "Nah," Rosenthal replied, making final adjustments

with the Speed Graphic's viewfinder. "Wait! There it goes!"

Swinging the camera to his face, Rosenthal clicked the shutter. He wasn't sure what he got, if anything at all.

With the larger flag planted firmly in place, Rosenthal gathered the jubilant Marines for a group photo. He hurried back to his command ship and dutifully wrote out the captions for the images he shot that day.

What he captured in 1/400<sup>th</sup> of a second proved an enormous sensation to the public back home, and made instant celebrities out of Sgt. Mike Strank, Cpl. Harlon Block, Cpl. Rene Gagnon, Cpl. Ira Hayes, Pfc. Franklin Sousley and Navy Pharmacist's Mate John Bradley.

Of the six flag-raisers, only Bradley, Hayes and Gagnon would return home alive.

Sensing the photo's mass appeal, President Franklin Roosevelt immediately printed millions of posters and plastered cities across the country with the image, kicking off the Seventh War Bond Tour. Led by reluctant celebrities Bradley, Hayes and Gagnon, the drive generated approximately \$24 billion – more than any other.

A mere 72 hours after seeing the Rosenthal photo for the first time, an ambitious sculptor named Felix DeWeldon

"I went up not knowing what kind of picture I'd get."

-- AP Photographer Joe Rosenthal



completed a clay replica of the flag raising.

Congress was besieged with letters from an adoring public calling for a national monument of the photo they loved.

The sheer size of the sculpture reflected the scope of the project itself: it would be the largest bronze statue of any kind - the largest in the world, standing 78 feet tall.

Survivors John Bradley, Rene Gagnon and Ira Hayes modeled for DeWeldon as he created each 32-foot tall figure.

Once cast in bronze, each section was shipped to Washington, D.C. where workers reassembled the massive sculpture atop a large granite base at Arlington, Va.

Inscribed on the base were the locations of major U.S. Marine Corps battles since the Revolutionary War and Adm. Chester W. Nimitz's summary of the Battle of Iwo Jima: "Uncommon Valor Was a Common Virtue."

President Dwight D. Eisenhower officially dedicated the United States Marine Corps Memorial Nov. 10, 1954 with Bradley, Gagnon, and Hayes in attendance. It would be the last time the three survivors would be photographed together.

Of all the flag-raisers, only Bradley lived to old age. Hayes, battling severe depression and alcoholism, would die from exposure almost 10 years to the day after he helped raise the flag. Gagnon, struggling hard to capitalize on his celebrity, died of a heart attack in 1979 at the age of 54. Bradley, who spoke only once of the event, died at the age of 70 on Jan. 11, 1994.

The photo, reproduced millions of times since it first appeared, garnered Rosenthal the Pulitzer Prize. Skepticism over the picture's authenticity gnawed at him over the years, as Rosenthal told and retold the story of the second flag-raising. Genaust's motion picture footage of the event confirms Rosenthal's account.

"I feel a gratification that the use of the picture, in general, has been very good," he explained. "It happened to be me. It might have been any photographer, or perhaps it might never have been taken at all. But it was me, and I stand for any photographer who would have been in a position to get such a photo."

(opposite page) AP Photographer Joe Rosenthal's Pulitzer Prize-winning shot of the second flag raising.

(below) Marines carry down the first flag as Sgt. Mike Strank, Cpl. Harlon Block, Cpl. Rene Gagnon, Cpl. Ira Hayes, Pfc. Franklin Sousley and Navy Pharmacist's Mate John Bradley secure the second, larger flag in place atop Mt. Suribachi Feb. 23, 1945. Most involved with both flag raisings would not live to the battle's conclusion as fighting raged on the island for 32 more days.







**A young Capt. Frank Caldwell (highlighted) poses with members of Fox Company, 26th Marine Regiment, 5th Marine Division, in a group photo during training at Camp Pendleton, Calif., July 1944. Of the nearly 300 members in Fox Company to see action at the Battle of Iwo Jima, only 44 would return alive. Caldwell was the only officer of Fox Company to survive.**

**By JO1(SW) Mike Jones  
Editor**

A complete sense of shock and confusion washed over Frank Caldwell as he heard the news crackle over the radio Dec. 7, 1941. Soon, thoughts of anger and avengement replaced those feelings as it had for millions of other Americans that bitter Christmas season of 1941.

The Davidson College senior was nearing graduation, and as an Army ROTC candidate, he steeled himself for what he knew would happen next: Uncle Sam would come calling.

Little did Caldwell expect that calling would take him to an extinct volcano in the Pacific with a name he'd never heard of and a rendezvous with destiny.

"Soon after graduating from college, I resigned my commission with the Army," he explained. "I wanted to be a Marine."

It was Spring 1942, and the wide-eyed Spartanburg, S.C. native stepped off the train in Quantico, Va. to begin officer training.

"While there, I selected the Marine Airborne Organization, which was then a battalion of parachutists, as my first tour of duty. I went through training at Camp Lejeune, N.C., at the parachute training school there."

In November 1942, after successfully completing six qualifying jumps, including one night jump, Caldwell received the coveted wings.

"It wasn't long after that I had orders to go overseas. In December I took my first trip overseas and left from San Francisco by way of a merchant ship," he said. For 21 days, Caldwell and the other embarked Marines sailed, as Japanese submarines circled menacingly below.

"I reported to the 1st Parachute Battalion in New Caledonia, which had just come out of combat at

Guadalcanal in the British Solomon Islands," he said.

With Caldwell as platoon leader, the battalion began six months of intensive training. "We had excellent weather for jumping and excellent terrain for small unit tactics. There we were able to reform our battalion, rebuild it and get it ready for another onslaught against the enemy further north."

#### **Bougainville**

Soon after, the battalion was ordered out to combat with the 3rd Marine Division.

"We were not used as jumpers although we thought we would be," Caldwell said. "We were mainly used to make amphibious raids behind the beachhead. We were very successful in some of these raids. We would catch the Japanese off guard and land at odd hours such as 4 a.m. and penetrate their defenses."

The vigor and excitement felt by many of the Marines who first tasted combat at Bougainville, quickly disappeared as mounting casualties reminded them all of the very real horrors of war. "It was at all like the war movies we had all seen. You became very aware of your mortality. You knew you could be dead at any moment. You wanted to get the job done quickly and right so you could go home."

#### **Camp Pendleton**

Soon after, the Corps decided it had little need for parachutists. "The troops, myself included, were ordered to infantry units. I was ordered stateside, which I did not mind one bit, to the 5th Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, Calif., where I was assigned as a rifle company commander."

In charge of Fox Company, 26th Regiment, 5th Marine Division, the task fell to Caldwell to thoroughly train his nearly 300 Marines for an objective none of them knew about. Nearly every aspect of just exactly what the 3rd, 4th









By JO1(SW) Mike Jones  
Editor

It was cold. If the sub-zero sting of the February breeze bothered you, you didn't show it. Not in front of these guys.

For gathered there in the silent crowd of hundreds at the base of Felix De Weldon's tribute in Arlington, Va., February 19 were members of the U.S. Marine Corps' legendary 3rd, 4th and 5th Divisions - Survivors of the Battle of Iwo Jima.

They're all in their 80s now, and time has taken its toll. But when you get close, you can see it in their eyes. They've endured far worse than a chilly morning outdoors.

They had come from across the country to remember another February morning 60 years earlier.

Most were barely out of their teens at the time, yet all were about to embark on one of the costliest and bloodiest campaigns of World War II.

Amphibious forces of the U.S. Pacific Fleet attacked the fortress of Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945, with a formidable force, totaling 495 ships, including 17 aircraft carriers, 1170 planes, and 110,308 troops.

The beaches were eerily quiet as the Higgins boats landed ashore and the Marines began to offload. The relentless, pre-invasion bombardment from naval and air forces must've surely worked.

The minimal resistance, however, proved only a ploy to draw the exposed Marines onto the beaches. It was then

that 20,000 determined Japanese defenders, led by General Tadamichi Kuribayashi, opened up from a vast underground network of caves and tunnels. The bombardment did little to soften the defenses.

Literally inching their way across the island, the Marines were able to secure Iwo after 36 days of brutal combat. Conquest of the ancient Pacific volcano was paramount. Its two available airstrips, Motoyama Number One and Number Two, were vital for the long-range bombing missions over mainland Japan. Success of allied forces in the Pacific could not be assured otherwise.

But victory came at a very heavy price. At the battle's conclusion, 6,281 Americans and more than 20,000 Japanese were killed. Twenty-two Marines and five Sailors received the Congressional Medal of Honor for their actions on Iwo - the most bestowed for any campaign. Adm. Chester Nimitz remarked, "Among the Americans who served on Iwo Jima, uncommon valor was a common virtue." His words now emblazon the base of De Weldon's statue.

The survivors are honored as heroes - a title most are quick to shrug off. The real heroes, they fiercely define, are the ones who didn't come back.

They attended, not for the accolades showered on them, but to remember their buddies. A bond forged through some of the harshest circumstances imaginable, and a loyalty far warmer than the cold February morning that brought them back together.





(opposite page) Battle of Iwo Jima Survivor Vincent Salzillo stands in the shadow of Sculptor Felix De Weldon's tribute to the flag raising atop Mt. Suribachi. Salzillo was among many Iwo survivors to attend a wreath-laying ceremony at the U.S. Marine Corps Memorial February 19, marking 60 years since the start of the Battle of Iwo Jima. Salzillo and other Survivors made themselves available following the ceremony, recalling the brutal campaign for the island.

(above) Lance Cpl. Nathan Hockenberry (right) presents Battle of Iwo Jima Survivor George Cattelona a shell casing following a remembrance ceremony at the U.S. Marine Corps Memorial February 19.

(right) Col. Frank Caldwell, USMC Ret., lays the wreath at the base of the U.S. Marine Corps Memorial during the remembrance ceremony February 19. (see related story, page 6)





# 60 Years Later

# In the Company of Heroes

Marines assist the wounded to an aid station during combat on Iwo Jima March 1945.



## Continued from page 7

Inching forward, Caldwell soon found the volcanic sand formidable. "You would sink up to your knees," he said. "It was impossible to get any sort of equipment or vehicles up over those dunes." As the Marines struggled to move inland, snipers and artillery rained down from the island's highest point, Mt. Suribachi.

Miraculously, the company made it across the mountain's base to the assembly area without sustaining serious casualties. "I felt very lucky to get there," he said.

That luck was depleting quickly as Japanese artillery showered down to the assembled Marines. "We were right near a tank park. The artillery would hit the tanks, and the tanks would explode." The incinerating fragments of metal flew through the air like boomerangs, he described. "We were dug in deep that night," he said. "Of all the nights I spent on Iwo, that first was the roughest."

Fox Company was well into their push North through their assigned area of action on the morning of February 23. As the mass of ships and troops let loose a loud cheer that morning, Caldwell turned around. Looking up the menacing cliffs, he spotted something. There, flying in the breeze atop Mt. Suribachi, was the American Flag.

The celebration was short-lived, however, as the Marines continued their push North. "We made headway with relative ease, initially. There was little resistance at first, but then we started receiving fire at our flanks," he said. "It would come down into these ravines and hit us at our sides. The Japanese were firing from these interconnected concrete bunkers. You'd try to return fire, only there'd be no one to return fire to."

With absolutely no cover available, Caldwell led his men across hundreds of yards to disable the bunkers.

Fox Company forged ahead as the Marines inched through such areas as "The Shooting Gallery," and "The Meat Grinder."

"My Executive Officer went down to examine a bunker

that had a tarp hanging in front of a door. He casually threw a phosphorous grenade into this bunker." The bunker had been filled with ammunition. "The blast blew him backwards, killing him instantly," Caldwell said.

The extreme conditions Fox Company faced only worsened as company leadership faced intense fire from the hidden positions. Casualties continued to mount as platoon leaders were picked off regularly by sniper fire. Enemy mortar and artillery attacks increased as the company pushed harder to the North. One of the biggest threats facing Fox Company, he realized, was a total organizational collapse within the ranks. Caldwell held them all together. He personally reorganized Fox Company on several occasions and often under fire, assuring optimal fighting strength among his men.

"We were pulled off the front lines from time to time, back about 40 yards," he said. "It was a great feeling - just to get a rest."

With the tanks and bulldozers able to gain ground, the Marines were able to advance further still under some protection. With the last of the defenders isolated at the island's Kitano Point, the island was finally declared secured after 36 days.

When it was all over, only 45 members of Fox Company survived - of that number, only a handful made it off the island under their own strength. Caldwell left Iwo Jima March 26, 1945.

For his actions during the battle, he was awarded the Navy Cross.

During the long trek home, Caldwell and the surviving members were able to begin coming to terms with what they had endured. "It's been 60 years, and I can still remember all the small details of what happened there," he said.

Today, he quietly lives in Northern Virginia with his wife. He is an active member of the 5th Marine Division Association, and most recently served as the veterans' representative at the wreath-laying ceremony at the U.S. Marine Corps Memorial in Arlington, Va.